

PLUGGED IN - JOANNA ALLHANDS

Joanna Allhands is a Southeast Valley editorial writer.

Copter crash adds to trauma issue

Two weeks ago, when we had a group of experts in to talk about the lack of a trauma center in the Southeast Valley, we were warned how dangerous emergency medical flights could be.

Mesa Fire Chief Harry Beck told us about the logistics of flying in and out of densely populated areas, especially in the heat. It can be difficult to maintain altitude, he said.

Then, tragically, helicopters crashed in Flagstaff and Prescott over the weekend, and some experts have since said the [copters are overused](#) to transport not-so-critically injured folks.

Which is exactly what we heard in our meeting two weeks ago. First responders must make split-second decisions where to take a patient based on his injuries. Often, if there's any question about the stability of the patient, paramedics will decide to have them transported to a Level 1 trauma center, which has beefed-up staffs available 24/7 to operate on critically injured patients at a moment's notice.

Better to be safe than sorry, right?

No trauma centers are located in the Southeast Valley. So once paramedics decide to transport someone, they also must make the split-second decision, based on traffic, location and other factors, whether to send them via ambulance or helicopter.

It can be quite confusing and nerve-racking.

This is where a better-planned trauma system would come in handy. By more evenly spreading trauma centers throughout the Valley -- and perhaps offering different levels of trauma care at different centers -- there would be less tendency to automatically send anyone in question to the current Level 1s in Scottsdale and downtown Phoenix.

A more developed system of trauma centers could help ensure that only those with the most serious, life-threatening injuries -- head traumas and the like -- get driven or flown outside the Southeast Valley for care.

Wednesday, July 2, 2008 at 10:35 AM

[Report a Violation](#)

Topics: [PLUGGED IN - SOUTHEAST VALLEY](#), [OPINIONS](#)